



**Testimony of Debora M. Bresch, Esq.**

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**In Support of HB to House Bill 5041 – an Act Concerning Cross-Reporting of Child Abuse and Animal Cruelty  
Select Committee on Children, February 23, 2010**

Senator Musto, Representative Urban, and fellow members of the Select Committee on Children, thank you for this opportunity to express the **strong support of the ASPCA and CT Votes for Animals – and their more than 24,000 Connecticut members – for House Bill 5041.**

We must resist all impulses to compartmentalize the welfare of animals and people – our fates are tied. The link between animal cruelty and family violence, in particular, is quite clear:

- A study found that animals were abused in 88 percent of the homes where child physical abuse was present (DeViney, Dickert, & Lockwood, 1983).
- A study of women seeking shelter at a safe house showed that 71 percent of those having companion animals reported that their partner had threatened, hurt, or killed their animals, and 32 percent of the mothers reported that their children had hurt or killed their animals (Ascione, 1998).
- Another study of women finding shelter at a safer house reported that 33.3 percent of those whose companion animals were abused reported that their children had also been abused. By contrast, of the women whose pets were not abused, 15.8 percent reported child abuse (Flynn, 2000).
- Another study indicated that violent offenders incarcerated in maximum security prisons were significantly more likely than nonviolent offenders to have committed childhood acts of cruelty toward animal companions (Merz-Perez, Heide, & Silverman, 2001).
- Over a dozen studies have reported that the threat of animals being killed or harmed is a significant barrier preventing battered women from escaping abusive situations (Ascione, 2007).

In addition to being associated with domestic violence, intentional animal abuse is often associated with other serious crimes including drug offenses, gang activity, weapons violations, and sexual assault

Thus, we now know that violence of all kinds is inextricably linked, and that where one member of a household – animal or human – is being abused, other members are likely being abused as well. HB 5041 – which would require animal control officers and Department of Children and Family Services employees to cross-report child abuse and animal abuse, respectively – is crucial because it would help make transparent the violence that was previously hidden. No longer would the abuse of an animal or a human family member be viewed in a vacuum, but rather, those in a position to assist would be required to help every family member in harm's way. Not only will this help the animal or person being harmed, but further investigation may well illuminate the full constellation of violence occurring in that household – not least because abused children may be more willing to discuss what has happened to a companion animal than their own victimization.

Mandated cross-reporting will help ensure that both human and animal family members receive help sooner, the abuser removed from the household earlier, and perhaps the circle of violence ended.